

**SEATTLE DOWNTOWN PARKS AND PUBLIC SPACES TASK
FORCE
TASK FORCE MEETING #1 SUMMARY
FEBRUARY 18, 2005**

Task Force Members Present

Ken Bounds, Co-chair
David Dillman, Co-chair
Kate Joncas, Co-chair
B.J. Brooks, Executive Staff
Eric Friedli, Subcommittee Chair
Anita Woo, Subcommittee Chair
Peggy Emerson

Bruce Bentley
David Brewster
Jordan Royer
Ron Sher
Tina Bueche
Christopher Williams

Parks & Rec. Staff

Dewey Potter
Victoria Schoenberg

Consultants

Bonnie Berk, Berk &
Associates
Michael Regnier,
Berk & Associates

Welcome and Introductions

Ken Bounds opened the meeting by welcoming all and discussing the charge of the Task Force. Task Force members introduced themselves and offered opening remarks. Bonnie Berk summarized the meeting's agenda.

Task Force and Subcommittee Work Plan and Organization

B.J. Brooks reviewed the roles and responsibilities of the Project Team, Task Force and Subcommittees, and gave a brief overview of the Mayor's Downtown Parks Initiative. Bonnie Berk reviewed the draft operating principles. The Task Force discussed the principles, specifying that "consensus" will be interpreted to mean not perfect agreement, but a result that all members can "live with." The Task Force agreed to revisit these principles at its next meeting.

The Task Force also discussed its approach to publicity and interest from the public: transparency. An announcement from the mayor is pending, and the Task Force will be publicized on the Parks & Recreation web site. Task Force members should feel free to answer news reporters' factual questions, but are advised to mention such inquiries to the Parks and Recreation communications staff so that reporters may be contacted with additional information.

The Task Force discussed its meeting schedule, preferring a meeting every third week, early enough in the morning to be convenient for business owners, and at a location accessible by public transportation.

Initial Discussion of Key Downtown Parks Issues and Needs

In a roundtable discussion, all Task Force members were asked to comment on what they perceive as the problems facing Seattle downtown parks. Comments included:

- Parks lack “organic” identities
- There is a negative perception, justified or not
- Who has ownership?
- Lack of balance (that would make them friendly to all people)
- Challenges of engaging with neighbors, business owners, citizens
- Lack of different reasons to visit
- Lack of connections to surrounding neighborhoods
- Lack of operational flexibility
- Perception of domination by one segment
- Lack of “image” of urban parks:
 - Are they for retreat or for stimulation?
 - Vary according to each park
- Uses change through out the day
- Exclusion (inclusion is better)
- Illegal behavior/crime
- Businesses/buildings turn their backs on downtown parks (are oriented away from the parks)
- Lack of public awareness of parks and integrated park system
- Lack of marketing to other neighbors
- “Fair weather”: Parks are not “12/7”; we need to make them friendly year around
- Finance challenges: cost vs. return
- Need to have clarity:
 - What actions are discretionary?
 - What is up for debate and what is not?
- System is worn, must repair, maintain, rebuild
- Need a code of conduct
- Too little law enforcement
- Not enough city funding available
- Noise problems: is noise ordinance reasonable?
- Difficulty in obtaining permits
- Not enough eyes on the parks
- Challenge of engaging downtown residents
- Designs are not inviting to tourists

The Task Force agreed to continue this discussion at its next meeting.

Next, again in roundtable fashion, Task Force members identified their questions and information requests for the two subcommittees:

1. General Background Materials for the Task Force

- List of the 24 downtown parks on a display board or flip chart
- Subcommittee roster and meeting schedule
- Kate J. requested an update of the chart she has showing details about each park

- Ken requested a list of issues, problems and ideas from the Metropolitan Improvement District (MID) staff
- What is the budget for downtown parks? Is there a capital budget, and have capital needs been identified?

2. Questions/Requests for the Operations Subcommittee

- *Benchmarking and best practices: operations.* What other cities or parks organizations does the City consider models? What cities do you benchmark Seattle against?
 - How often do those cities perform maintenance in their downtown parks?
 - What are their key operations practices – is there anything we can learn from them?
 - How do other parks handle vending (especially food)?
- *Maintenance practices currently.* How is maintenance performed in the parks now?
 - How can we maximize the resources of different groups involved?
 - What role does/could the MID play?
- *Police work plan.* Is there a police plan for downtown parks? What is it?

3. Questions/Requests for the Programming & Special Events Subcommittee

- *Current permitting situation*
 - What are the permit fees for downtown parks?
 - How do these fees compare to those imposed elsewhere?
 - What activities are now forbidden in the parks, either explicitly or de facto because of permitting requirements?

- *Benchmarking and best practices: permitting*
 - Are there examples of turnkey permitting processes elsewhere, i.e. ways to get special events permitted quickly?
 - What are possible ways to streamline the permitting process?
- *Opportunities*
 - What activities are allowed but don't seem to occur?
 - What changes can make downtown parks better venues for activities?
- *Integration with downtown arts events and venues*
 - How can we use downtown cultural venues to market events at the parks?
 - Is there potential for arts groups (e.g. SAM, Seattle Center, theaters) to bring activity—even promotional activity—to the parks?
 - Street performances – are there opportunities to market to street performers?

Action Items, Next Steps and Next Meeting

A meeting has been set for 8-10 a.m. on Friday, March 11, in the Boards & Commissions Conference Room on Level 2 at City Hall 600 4th Avenue. Task Force members are requested to print and bring their own copies of the agenda, to be distributed electronically in advance.